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# News Release



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## **SERVICE DETERMINES MONO BASIN AREA SAGE GROUSE DOES NOT WARRANT EMERGENCY PROTECTION OF ESA**

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) concluded that a petition requesting emergency Endangered Species Act protection for the Mono Basin population of greater sage grouse does not present substantial scientific or commercial information to warrant such protection.

“We are concerned about the sage grouse in Mono Basin. However, given the available information, the status of the population is uncertain at this time,” said Bob Williams, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Supervisor for Nevada. “Conservation plans are being developed to address ways to protect the species and its habitat while we continue to research if this species is unique and if the range extends into other areas of California and Nevada as believed.”

In its petition to list greater sage grouse in the Mono Basin area under the emergency provisions of the Endangered Species Act, the Institute for Wildlife Protection asked the Service to recognize populations of birds in Long Valley and Bodie Hills in Mono County, California and in the Desert Creek area of Lyon County, Nevada as distinct from other forms of greater sage grouse. The group stated that these two populations, collectively known as Mono Basin sage grouse, are genetically unique and isolated from other greater sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus phaios*) and should be considered a distinct population segment (DPS) under Service policy, making them eligible for protection as a separate species. The petition also states that invasion of cheat grass into sage grouse foraging areas, the spread of juniper trees, disease, grazing, development and other human-caused threats will likely cause the Mono Basin area sage grouse to become extinct in the foreseeable future.

After analyzing the petition, the Service determined that it does not present sufficient evidence that emergency listing is warranted, or that the Mono Basin population should be designated as a DPS.

“We agree with the findings of the USFWS in regards to this petition,” said Terry Crawford, Administrator for the Nevada Division of Wildlife. “This decision will allow the State of Nevada to continue with its proactive sage grouse conservation planning process. This important work is being carried out by the Governor's Sage Grouse Planning Team and the Local Area Planning groups. These teams have been working hard to arrive at creative solutions to the difficult challenges of managing the sage grouse in Nevada.”

The Endangered Species Act gives the Service the authority to list as endangered or threatened not only species as recognized in formal taxonomic terms, but also subspecies, and for vertebrates, distinct population segments of a species whose total population and range would otherwise make it ineligible for Endangered Species Act protection. The Service has defined a DPS as one that is separated from other populations of the species by physical, physiological, genetic, ecological, or behavioral factors; has biological and ecological significance; and, if it were treated as a separate species, would be considered as threatened or endangered.

Listing, delisting, or reclassifying distinct vertebrate population segments may allow the Services to protect and conserve species and the ecosystems upon which they depend before large-scale decline occurs that would necessitate listing a species or subspecies throughout its entire range. This may allow protection and recovery of declining organisms in a more timely and less costly manner, and on a smaller scale than the more costly and extensive efforts that might be needed to recover an entire species or subspecies.

The Nevada Division of Wildlife and the California Department of Fish and Game have identified other populations of greater sage grouse near those identified in the petition. Those sage grouse have yet to be genetically analyzed to determine how they relate to the Mono Basin birds.

“We will also continue to assist the states and counties in developing conservation plans that will protect the species and its habitat,” said Williams.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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